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ESSEX-STREET CHURCH, BOSTON,

JAN. 31, FEB. 8, 15, AND 21, 1866.

BOSTON:
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LETTER MISSIVE.

BOSTON, Jan. 19, 1866.

To the *Church, Boston, with their Pastor,*
Rev. *the Union Church, Essex Street,*
Boston, sends greeting: —

DEAR CHRISTIAN BRETHREN, — You are aware that there seems to be a growing desire and expectation among us with regard to an increase of attention to the subject of personal salvation by Christ, and that Christians are consulting with one another as to the best ways of promoting it.

In former years, our Churches, with their Pastors, were accustomed to confer and act together with regard to the interests of religion in Boston. A united action on this subject serves to give strength to such measures as may be deemed desirable.

And whereas it is consonant with our Congregational usage that some one Church should take the first step when the Churches are invited to council together, and it having been suggested by some who are interested in this movement, that the Church whose Pastor has had the longest term of pastoral service in one Church could, with common assent, properly issue the Letter Missive for this purpose: —

We do, therefore, as a sister Church, affectionately invite you to be present, by your Pastor and *three* Delegates, at an Ecclesiastical Council, in the Lecture-room of this Church, on WEDNESDAY AFTERNOON, JANUARY THE THIRTY-FIRST, instant, at a *quarter past three* o'clock, to devise and recommend such practical measures as the Council may judge best adapted to extend a knowledge of salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ among the population of this city, and to impress the claims of the Gospel upon their consciences and hearts.

With cordial affection, your brethren in Christ,
In behalf of the Union Church,
N. ADAMS, *Pastor.*

DANIEL W. JOB, *Clerk* (*pro tem.*).

THE COUNCIL WILL CONSIST OF

THE ORTHODOX CONGREGATIONAL CHURCHES OF BOSTON, viz.:—

CHURCHES.	PASTORS.
Old South.	Rev. G. W. Blagden, D.D., and Rev. J. M. Manning.
Park Street	Rev. A. L. Stone, D.D.*
Union.	Rev. N. Adams, D.D.
Phillips	Rev. E. K. Alden.
Berkeley Street	Rev. H. M. Dexter, D.D.
Salem	Rev. S. P. Fay, Acting Pastor.
Mariners'	
Central.	Rev. J. E. Todd.
Maverick	Rev. J. S. Bingham.
Mount Vernon	Rev. E. N. Kirk, D.D.
Shawmut	Rev. E. B. Webb, D.D.
Springfield Street	
E Street	Rev. A. R. Baker, Acting Pastor.
Chambers Street	Rev. G. W. Blagden, D.D., and Rev. J. M. Manning.

* Rev. Dr. Stone having resigned the pastoral charge of the Park-street Church, subject to the action of a Council, he is hereby invited as an honorary member, in the event of his dismission.

RESULT.

PURSUANT to letters missive of which the foregoing was the form, the Congregational Churches of Boston met in Council, by their Pastors and specified number of Delegates, at the appointed time and place, for the purpose of considering the state of religion, and devising and recommending practical measures for the furtherance of the Gospel in this city; and having held several sessions of a deeply devotional as well as a deliberative character, and having listened to important reports of committees appointed to set forth the defects in our religious condition, their causes and their remedies, — and having heard these subjects freely remarked upon and discussed, — and having humbly and earnestly sought the Divine guidance, — came to the following

RESULT.

For the feelings among Christians which led to the call of this Council, — for our assembling,

— for the spiritual interest and power of our sessions, increasing to their close, — and for the influence of these things upon the Churches, manifest and already extensive, — we are profoundly grateful to the Head of the Church.

We feel that in these things some of the true purposes of this Council have been already accomplished.

What further measures for the promotion of a deeper and more extensive religious interest among us may be expedient, is an important but difficult question. Different measures are suited to different times, and to Churches and neighborhoods of different character and condition; and therefore we are compelled to pass by many measures which are not of general applicability, and do not meet with universal approval.

We call the attention of the Churches to the imperative duty of entering upon new and more earnest courses of action. We are beset on the one side by rationalism and infidelity, on the other side by superstition, on every side by worldliness, ungodliness and vice. Multitudes around us, including many united to us by the strongest ties, are without any interest in the

Saviour, and are, therefore, in the way to everlasting ruin. At the same time, wordliness has crept into our Churches, the love of many has grown cold, and a wicked and fatal indifference and inactivity has paralyzed their energies.

We do, therefore, by their love of Christ, by their compassion for the perishing, by their hope of salvation, affectionately and solemnly adjure our Churches to employ such prompt, new and decided measures for the advance of the kingdom of Christ in and around them, as the Spirit of Christ which is in each shall suggest; and we do affectionately and solemnly adjure each of our Church members to enter at once upon a deeper and more thorough humiliation and repentance before God, a more entire separation of heart and life from the world, and a more faithful and earnest personal activity in the work of saving souls.

We feel that our first duty is, to point out affectionately but very plainly, some of the causes of this coldness, indifference and inactivity which we all so deeply deplore.

We all acknowledge the general truth, that if there is ever to be a revival in a Church, it must

commence in the hearts of its members. We cannot hope for God's blessing upon the meetings and the prayers of nominal Christians who are daily sinning against their Maker, and whose daily lives are devoted to the service of mammon; such prayers are empty forms, without reverence, or love, or faith.

The sins of individual Christians are the cause of this condition of the Churches of Christ. While we rejoice to know and to acknowledge the unaffected piety, the simple faith and holy lives of so many Christians, we are also aware that the most earnest and the most devoted are those who are most alarmed at the general condition of the Churches.

There are many of the nominal members of the Churches of Christ whose daily lives are at war with the plain commands of the Gospel. Do they love God supremely? Are their affections set upon heavenly things? They do not endeavor to renounce the sinful customs and vanities of this world; but they allow the solemn realities of religion to become secondary to the duties and pleasures of the passing hour. Parents neglect family worship and faithful religious instruction in their families; they disregard the

eternal welfare and the salvation of the immortal souls of their children, and make their duties to God subordinate to the friendships, the claims, the pleasures and the frivolities of social life. Trifling causes, which do not keep the lovers of pleasure from theatres and balls and parties, are sufficient to prevent nominal Christians from attending the services of God's sanctuary and the weekly meetings for prayer.

Prominent among the evils with regard to which there can be no trifling and no compromise, are two. We refer to the neglect of daily secret prayer and of the daily study of God's Word.

We desire to express our settled conviction, that daily secret prayer (not a formal lip service, but a real and consecrated communion with our Heavenly Father,) is as essential to a true Christian life as vital air is to the life of the body; and that a daily study of the Bible, with prayer for God's blessing upon the study of His own Word, is indispensable to growth in grace, and, indeed, to any really religious life. We have reason to believe that both of these vital points are daily neglected, to the endangering of many souls.

In connection with these duties we wish to bring forward into prominent view one great cause of the want of progress in the Church of Christ on earth. This is, that with but comparatively few exceptions, our members are not working for the cause of Christ and His kingdom.

What different results we might expect if every Christian were earnestly at work for the saving of souls! We believe that this is a plain Christian duty which cannot be neglected or evaded, that it is essential to a true Christian life, and that the only truly happy Christians are always working Christians.

RECOMMENDATIONS.

RENEWAL OF COVENANT.

In view of the painful declension in the Churches, and of the solemn responsibilities of this hour, when all around us we can hear of the coming power and glory of God, we do solemnly and earnestly recommend to each one of you, our Christian brethren and sisters, that you study

carefully, and with earnest prayer, your covenant with God. Your conscience will instruct you as to your fidelity to the vows which you once took upon yourself in the presence of God and of His holy angels. If you feel that you have broken your covenant and neglected your duties, you *must* return, as a penitent sinner, to the one strait and narrow way. You *must* humble yourself before your Maker, and repent, and seek forgiveness and mercy through the atoning sacrifice of Christ, until you receive that free pardon which He gives to all who in sincerity and humility come to Him; and *then* you will be enabled by a sincere and heartfelt reconsecration of yourself to Christ, to become a living member of the Church to which you now are an occasion of grief and reproach. We know that this reconsecration is possible to every individual Christian, not as an empty form, nor by any public profession only, but after sincere self-humiliation, and a new pardon, and a glad reconciliation with God.

In order that this individual duty of humiliation and repentance, and of a new consecration to the service and glory of God may, in the most solemn

manner, be brought home to the heart and conscience of every Christian, we recommend that all our Churches should simultaneously, on the third Sabbath of March, solemnly renew their covenant with God and with each other, and that this day should be devoted by every Christian to conscientious and searching self-examination, and to sincere humiliation before God. In order that this reconsecration may be general and effectual, we suggest that early notice should be given so far as possible, to every member of the Churches, and that one or more appropriate sermons be preached in each Church on or before the appointed day.

UNION COMMUNION.

We recommend also that in the evening of this day there should be united communion services in the Park-street Church, designed solely for the members of the Churches represented in this Council, in which they may join in token of their brotherly love, and union in Christ, as well as to seek the Divine blessing upon their solemn vows of reconsecration to the service and glory of God.

ADDRESSES TO CHURCH MEMBERS.

In order that the dangers and temptations to which Christians are exposed, the causes of coldness in our Churches, and the means through which we hope for a renewal of the work of the Holy Spirit among us, may be plainly set before the members of our Churches, we recommend that addresses by the Pastors be prepared and printed for distribution in every Church, upon the following subjects:

1. The Duty of a More Strict Observance of the Sabbath, by Rev. Dr. BLAGDEN.
2. The Power and Office of the Holy Spirit, by Rev. Dr. ADAMS.
3. The Power of Prayer, by Rev. Dr. KIRK.
4. The Christian's Reconsecration, by Rev. Mr. ALDEN.
5. The Worldliness of Nominal Christians, by Rev. Dr. WEBB.
6. The Spread of the Gospel in the City among the Poor and those who habitually neglect the Services of the Sabbath, by Rev. Dr. DEXTER.
7. The Christian's Duty to work for the Saving of Souls, by Rev. Mr. BINGHAM.
8. Revivals of Religion, by Rev. Mr. TODD.

9. The Duty of Daily Secret Prayer and Daily Study of the Bible, by Rev. Mr. MANNING.

10. The Duty of Christians to unite with some Church, and the Duty of Church Members to unite with the Church where they statedly worship, by Rev. Mr. FAY.

11. The Divine Sovereignty in its Relation to Human Salvation, by Rev. Mr. BAKER.

OBSERVANCE OF THE SABBATH.

We are convinced that the services of the Lord's Day ought to be considered *supreme* above all other times and means of grace. The members of our Churches should keep God's Sabbaths holy, and reverence His sanctuary by attending on both the services usually held. We know that these great duties are too much neglected.

PREACHING.

We believe that it is desirable that the Pastors should select subjects for their sermons such as the present hour seems to demand: and we recommend great plainness and distinctness in preaching upon those grand and solemn doctrines of the Bible: Man's total alienation from God; the Divine justice in the eternal punishment of

the wicked; the new birth; salvation through faith in Christ.

These primal truths of God's Word, and Christ's stern and awful warnings against a nominal and merely formal worship of God should be preached afresh without any compromises with pride, heresy or worldliness; and God's ministers should be sustained and supported by Christians in this high duty.

UNION AMONG CHURCHES.

We recommend that every means should be taken to bring about a more fraternal union and practical sympathy and co-operation between all our Churches in the city. A more familiar intercourse and more frequent associations will bring about these desirable results. Mutual regard and respect and acquaintance should be cultivated, in every manner, and as some of the means to insure these objects, we recommend: combined or union prayer meetings; informal delegations of members from one Church to another at the usual social meetings; united public services as occasion may offer; occasional unions in the communion services; and more frequent exchanges among the Pastors.

PRAYER FOR THE HOLY SPIRIT.

We need a higher faith in the prevailing power of prayer. If the five thousand members of our Churches were awakened to the solemn responsibilities of the present moment, and were all united in fervent daily prayers for God's blessing, we should not require councils, or need to suggest reforms.

We therefore earnestly adjure all who love the Lord Jesus Christ that they do daily, with deep earnestness and trusting faith, strive earnestly in prayer for the manifest presence and power of the Holy Spirit in all our Churches.

EXTRA MEETINGS.

We are disposed to believe that much of the force and efficiency of the Sabbath services is lost because the hearers during the week are given up to the world, and the solemn impressions of the Sabbath are effaced. We therefore recommend that each Church should increase the number of its social prayer meetings: and that for the present these meetings should usually be devoted to prayers for the Holy Spirit and for

the conversion of the impenitent. We suggest also that increased efforts should be made by Christians to induce the unconverted to attend these meetings.

GENERAL VISITATION.

We recommend that in each Church competent and experienced Christians shall be appointed to visit the members, for the purpose of conversing with them on the subject of personal religion, for their mutual profit. In this way the hearts of true Christians may be encouraged and quickened, and the unfaithful may be won back to duty and their first love. It would be well for the visitors to go forth two and two, as the Lord appointed, a few members of the Church being assigned to each pair. Simultaneous neighborhood prayer meetings, or a special Church meeting might profitably close the work.

SPECIAL AND PROTRACTED MEETINGS.

The subject of special meetings in the daytime during the week, and of protracted meetings, seems to depend so much upon the spiritual state, and the situation in other respects, of our

several Churches, that we think it best to make this suggestion only,—that whenever any Church shall appoint such meetings, it is the duty of all sister Churches, so far as it may be convenient, to co-operate sincerely, and assist them.

SABBATH SCHOOLS.

We recommend a more general and faithful attendance upon the Sabbath Schools, especially on the part of adults. Every member of our congregations, and especially every Christian, for whom it is possible, should be connected with some Sabbath School, as a teacher or a scholar. The Sabbath School ought to be employed as a means of drawing children and others into the services of the sanctuary, and not as an independent and superior instrumentality of grace. We suggest also, that the Sabbath School should be made less a means of merely interesting and amusing the children, and more a means of instructing them and bringing them to Christ; and that every Sabbath School teacher is bound to use the most diligent and faithful efforts to bring the children to a personal interest in the Saviour.

CITY MISSIONARY SOCIETY.

We recommend a more earnest attention on the part of every Church to the wants and claims of the City Missionary Society. The number of missionaries needs to be increased; and the means of enabling them to minister temporal relief, as it opens a direct road for the Gospel to the hearts of the suffering, should be liberally supplied. Every Church ought to have missionaries of its own employed under the general direction of this Society.

LAY PREACHERS.

If any Church can procure from among its own members, or elsewhere, suitable men to preach Christ in mission chapels, halls, or vestries, as lay preachers under the supervision and with the co-operation of the Pastor, we earnestly recommend the employment of such assistance.

NEW CHURCHES, ETC.

In view of the dense and neglected population in the north part of the city, it would be obviously unfaithful to the Master, should our

Churches cease to maintain vigorously our faith and polity in that part of the city; while the rapid growth of the city, in our judgment, requires the immediate erection of a new meeting-house and the consequent organization of a new Church of our order at the extreme South End, and also at East Boston.

DISTRICTING THE CITY.

We believe that the apportionment of the city into districts, and the assignment of a district to each Church for its religious care, is already in progress. We recommend each church to accept the field of labor which shall be offered it, and enter with alacrity and vigor upon the work. The religious condition of every family should be known; and not a child unconnected with any Sabbath School should be left unsought; not a stranger in the city should be left to its temptations and snares, uncaught by a Christian hand; and not an individual should be permitted to pass through and out of life, within the bounds of the district, without having distinctly and repeatedly presented to him, the knowledge and offers of Christ's salvation.

Such a work will call for much self-denying labor on the part of the whole Church; and we do, in the most solemn manner, and by the most sacred considerations, urge the Churches to come up heartily to the work. Let every Christian feel that there is something for him, or her, to do. Let some work be assigned to each, according to his or her several ability. Let every Christian remember, that not only among the poor and lost, but at home and by the way, in business circles and among his friends, he is under the strongest obligations to preach Christ, with modesty, wisdom, meekness and love, not only by his works but with his lips.

ENCOURAGEMENT TO LABOR.

We call the attention of the Churches to the fact that at the present time we have special encouragement to labor. There seems to be a readiness in the minds of men to listen to the Gospel. There seems to be a general expectation of an unusual outpouring of the Spirit. All around us showers of grace are falling. In all of our Churches there is an element of faithfulness and prayer; in some of them there is an

unusually tender and solemn state of feeling. In our own sessions and their influence we believe that we have seen indications that the Lord is with us, and going before us.

Let us, then, Pastors and Churches, awake to the responsibilities and privileges of the hour. The time is short; the reward is great; and lo! Christ is with us alway.

Addresses to Church Members

Are in preparation, as follows, viz.: —

1. The Duty of a more Strict Observance of the Sabbath, by Rev. Dr. BLAGDEN.

2. The Power and Office of the Holy Spirit, by Rev. Dr. ADAMS.

3. The Power of Prayer, by Rev. Dr. KIRK.

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11. The Divine Sovereignty in its Relation to Human Salvation, by Rev. Mr. BAKER.

In accordance with the recommendation of the Council, the Addresses named above will be printed without delay, for the purpose suggested. The first of the series, by Rev. Mr. ALDEN, will be issued in a few days.

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